

RECEPTION NECESSARY TO HOLY COMMUNION.

THE SERMON PREACHED IN

ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
HAMILTON VILLAGE,

PHILADELPHIA,

ON THE MORNING OF THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

MARCH 6, 1887.

BY THE RECTOR:

THE REV. THOMAS C. YARNALL, D. D.

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INTRODUCTION.

The following sermon has been asked by kind friends for publication. It can claim but little merit, if it has any, beyond that of gathering into one point of view the testimony of the Prayer Book concerning a leading feature in the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. If we are to be governed by the Prayer Book, it is well to know what that book emphatically teaches touching the matter to which chief attention is herein called. I am very glad to find that the main position of my sermon is in accord with a recent sermon or charge of Bishop Doane's, of Albany, which, however, I had not seen at the time of my writing. Still, I must beg leave to dissent from what he says about the sacrificial meaning of *προέω* in our Lord's words of Institution; and, with all due respect, I would place against what the Bishop has here said, the following passage from a University Sermon of the Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford, some fifteen years ago: "It is true that in some instances in the Septuagint, the word is used in a sacrificial sense, yet this is never the case except where it

is joined with some other word, which requires it to be so understood. There is nothing in the present context, nor, indeed, in any other place in the New Testament, which of itself requires or even suggests such a meaning. With as much reason might we translate the Blessed Virgin's words, *ὅ τι ἄν λέγῃ ὑμῖν ποιήσατε*, "Whatsoever he saith unto you sacrifice," or our Lord's, *Ὅδ' δύνάμαι ἐγὼ ποιῆν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ οὐδέν*, "I can of mine own self sacrifice nothing."

SERMON.

S. John, VI. 51. "I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread which I will give, is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

A practice has sprung up quite recently in a few—happily a very few—of our churches, in which what is called a High Celebration takes place; that is, where, after the recitation of the words appointed to be said in the earlier part of "The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion," the only one receiving the consecrated Bread and Wine is the officiating clergyman. Possibly, to save appearances, or to comply with the bare letter of the office, in some cases, one or two assistants—acolytes—receive with him; while, however, the congregation in the body of the church do not commune, and are not expected to commune. I know that it is said, in excuse for this, that the congregation has communed earlier in the day.

Now, any one who is familiar with the Prayer

Book, and who has no theory of his own to serve, and, I am almost tempted to say, who has honesty and common sense, must see that the practice I have mentioned is entirely at variance with the Order for Holy Communion as set forth by our Church. You will notice that the very title of the office is, The Order for the *Administration* of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. This order contemplates a body of communicants at the time of the celebration of Holy Communion, receiving the emblems of the Lord's passion and death, receiving the Bread and Wine which he commanded to be received in remembrance of himself. There is indeed no Communion, in any proper conception of the Sacrament, without reception. If you look at the office you will see that "when the minister giveth warning for the celebration of the Holy Communion," he is instructed to say, "I propose through God's assistance *to administer* to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed the most comfortable sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ; *to be by them received* in remembrance of his meritorious cross and passion." These words occur, you will remember, in the former of the two bidding calls to Communion, which former call also speaks of Christ being "Our spiritual food and sustenance in that Holy Sacrament," and instructs how we may "be received as worthy *partakers* of that Holy Table." And so, in the second, which is, perhaps, the more beautiful of these exhortations we are called upon to be "*partakers* of this Holy Commu-

nion," and are warned against "wilfully abstaining from the Lord's Table, and separating from our brethren who come *to feed on the banquet* of that most heavenly food." And at the time of the celebration, the longer exhortation then tells those who mind to come to Holy Communion, that they "must consider how Saint Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume *to eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup*; while the shorter exhortation contains the words, "*Draw near* with faith, and *take* this Holy Sacrament to your comfort." The rubric before the prayer of humble access, as it is called, is, "Then shall the Priest, kneeling down at the Lord's Table, say, in the name of all those who shall *receive* the Communion, this prayer following," in the course of which we ask, "Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood,"—the meaning of these words being, as their whole context shows, that we may so partake of the symbols of Christ's passion, as that we may share in what his broken body and poured-out blood were designed to procure for men. So, too, in The Invocation in the Prayer of Consecration, we say, "We most humbly beseech thee, O Merciful Father, to hear us; and of thy almighty goodness, vouchsafe to bless and sanctify, with thy Word and Holy Spirit, these thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine; that we, *receiving them*

according to thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood."

Then again, in the thanksgiving prayer after reception, we say, "Almighty and Everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us *who have duly received these holy mysteries*, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ."

We see, therefore, how much stress is laid in the very office itself of Holy Communion, upon the act of reception—not of one only for others who are present, but not communicating—such reception is not even contemplated as a possibility—but upon the act of reception so far as it is the personal act of all who are present at the celebration of the rite.

So, too, in the Catechism, while the distinction is clearly made between the outward and the inward parts of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we find that there is no proper definition of the Sacrament *without reception in both its parts*. Its outward part, the Catechism teaches us, consists in "Bread and Wine, which *the Lord hath commanded to be received*." And in answer to the question, "What is the inward part, or thing signified?" we there read, "The Body and Blood of Christ, which are spiritually taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper." And then, in answer to the question, "What are the benefits whereof we are partakers thereby?"

it is said, "The strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, *as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine*." Clearly, the only legitimate conception here of the Sacrament consists in the union of its two parts—the right reception of its outward part by us, involving our thankful recognition or reception of its inward part. Mark, too, the concluding question of the Catechism: "What is required of those who come to the Lord's Supper?" Here the only fair meaning of the words, "those who come to the Lord's Supper," is those who come to partake of the Supper. And what is required of these persons is, the Catechism says, "To examine themselves, whether they repent them truly of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death, and be in charity with all men." If this is the case with us, then may we come to this Holy Sacrament hoping to find here the pardon we need, and the strength which we need to serve God aright, as well as to truly glorify him here for his great mercy towards us in having of old sent his Son to die for us, and to find in him who gave himself for us an all-sufficient Saviour. One more authority from the Prayer Book I quote in support of what I have been saying. It is found in the twenty-eighth of our Articles of Religion. We there read that, "The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather it is

a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death : inso-much"—and to this I beg to call particular attention—"insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, *receive the same*, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ." The Article then goes on strongly to condemn the notion of Transubstantiation, and ends in these words: "The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped."

In further explanation of some of the expressions here used, this, from the writings of a most judicious and learned divine, I commend to your thoughtful consideration: "The *body* and *blood* of Christ are to be understood," Archbishop Sharp says, "in such a sense as a *soul* can be supposed to feed upon a *body*, or to receive strength and nourishment by *feeding* upon it. But now the *body* of Christ can be no otherwise as *food* for the strengthening and refreshing of our souls, than only as the *spiritual benefits* of that body and blood, that is to say, the *virtue and effects of Christ's sacrifice* upon the Cross, are communicated to it; nor is the soul capable of receiving those benefits otherwise than by *faith*. So that the *body* and *blood* of Christ, in the sense of our Church, are only the *benefits of Christ's*

passion; that is to say, the *pardon of sin*, and the *grace* of the *Holy Spirit*, and a *nearer union with Christ*, and our *eating* and *drinking* of that body and blood, is our being *partakers* of those *benefits*; and the *mouth* whereby we thus eat and drink, that is the *means* whereby we are made partakers of those benefits, is our true and lively faith." "This account," says one* who was perhaps equally learned and judicious with this writer, "is formed upon our Catechism, and upon the old principles of our first *Reformers*, and the next succeeding *divines*, before any refined speculations came in to obscure or perplex a plain notion, and a very important truth." I quote a few words now from Bishop Patrick: "The Body and Blood of Christ are verily and indeed received of the faithful; that is, they have a *real part* and *portion* given them in the *death* and *sufferings* of the Lord Jesus, whose body was broken and blood shed for the remission of sins. They truly and indeed partake of the *virtue* of his *bloody sacrifice*, whereby he hath obtained eternal redemption for us."

The testimony of these two men, Doctors Sharp and Patrick, is valuable as coming from those who were faithful witnesses for the truth at a time of deep trial to the Church of England when the mad effort was made by the last of the Stuart kings to carry over, by his own arbitrary power, Church and Realm to subjection to Rome. At a somewhat later period, the eminently godly bishop, Thomas Wilson, who in 1697 was appointed

*Dr. Waterland.

Bishop of Sodor and Man, writing on the Lord's Supper, says that Christ "did ordain this Sacrament as a memorial of our redemption, and of his love for us, as a pledge to assure us of it, and as an outward means and sign of testifying, as well as increasing, our love to him." And in 1765, Archbishop Synge writes, "It was appointed, First, to put us in remembrance of the death and suffering of our Saviour Jesus Christ; the breaking of the bread being put to represent the Crucifixion of his Body, and the wine his blood, which was shed for us. And, secondly, that it might be to us not only the commemoration, but also the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ; that is to say, the means which God has ordained, by the use of which we do communicate in the benefits of that sacrifice which Christ offered, and in the merits of that death and passion which he underwent in his body, and by the shedding of his blood for us."

I have dwelt upon what I have now brought before you—giving you quotations from our formularies, and extracts from the writings of able divines,—because there is a tendency at the present day to mystify the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, rather than to look at it in the light in which it is set before us in the several accounts of it which we have in the New Testament, and in the interpretation of these contained in the Prayer Book. Passages are sometimes quoted, as for example, from the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where the celebrated discourse occurs which our Lord delivered in Capernaum,

and the strong expressions which we there find of his are cited by many without reference to his concluding saying, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life,"—a saying evidently intended to guard against the materializing sense which the Jews put upon his discourse when they said, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And it would seem to be thought by some that the more of outward show, the more of ceremonial, which can be thrown around the Sacrament, the more reverence is manifested towards our blessed Lord. And herein may possibly lie the secret of the practice upon which I animadverted in the beginning of my present remarks. I do not wish, however, to be understood as in degree attaching light importance to the Holy Sacrament. Rather, I would attach to it very great importance, inasmuch as it was instituted by our Lord himself, on the eve of his passion, as a memorial of himself. "This do in remembrance of me" comes to us as a command from him at the most solemn period of his life,—a command all the more to be observed, to be obeyed, because it brings before us the remembrance of his death. The words, "This is my body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of me; this cup is the New Testament—the new covenant, in my blood which is shed for you," point us to the greatness of the sacrifice which was made for us. And the words spoken at Capernaum, a portion of which I have read to you as my text, tell us of

the high blessings which are ours, if we truly receive him who spake them. What more wonderful, what more blessed truth, indeed, can be conveyed to men than that which is set forth in Christ's declaration, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven!" It is not a mere temporary supply which is made for our wants—not perishing manna—which is here provided for us; but it "is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." It is the bread in which, or in whom is everlasting life. "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever." It is that we may indeed eat of this bread; that we may be brought nigh to him, so that we may spiritually partake of him; that is, that we may come to him to find in him the pardon which we need, and the grace and the strength which we need to enable us to serve him aright; that we may learn from him his love, and learn to love him more and more; that we may find in him our salvation, and realize the greatness of this salvation; that we may feed on him in our hearts by faith, that we come to this our Communion Feast. It is that we may dwell for awhile with Christ in his passion; that our hearts may go forth to him as we think of what he has done for us by dying for us; that the pitifulness of his great mercy may arrest our thoughtful meditation; that he may come to us by his Holy Spirit and renew in us whatever we have suffered to decay of our love towards him, that we obey his command, "This do in remembrance of me." And, is it not

of God's great mercy towards us, is it not of Christ's tender love for us, that we are thus reminded of what we owe to this mercy, of how much we are beholden to this love? For the world is ever about us; the cares of this life press upon us; the temptations of Satan abound; the evil of our own hearts would fain get the mastery over us; the rush and roar of the things of time tends to drown the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit: but here in the celebration of this most sacred rite we enter, as it were, into the presence-chamber of our loving God; his outstretched arm is ready to receive us, and we recall the words of his dear Son, "The bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." As it were, we anticipate now the day of days when we shall be forever with him who hath redeemed us, who hath washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. We "are come" *now* "unto Mount Zion, and unto the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly and Church of the first-born which are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." We are in union and communion, so far as we here draw nigh to Christ, with all them that are Christ's; with all God's servants who have departed this life in his faith and fear, as

well as with those his true-hearted children who are still in the flesh. What a bond, then, is this Holy Sacrament to us; a bond of our union with God, with Christ, with the holy angels, with the great company of the redeemed! For with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven we here laud and magnify God's holy name. Our loved ones are with us here, in our thought, in our remembrance, although they may be visible no longer to our moral sight; but with the eye of faith we behold them in the Rest of Paradise, glorifying God, and with us praising him for the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

O blessed fellowship of God's elect! Surely here is the realization of the apostle's words to the Ephesians: "There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." God help us, therefore, not to make of this holy sacrament an unreality, not to debase it to a scenic show, but to use it as not abusing it; to remember for what it was instituted; to use it as a sacred memorial of him in whom is our life; to use it that we may so draw nigh to him as that he will draw nigh to us; to so use it as that our fellowship may be with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ; and that we may have such fellowship one with another as that the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, may cleanse us from all sin, and thus prepare us for our home on high.